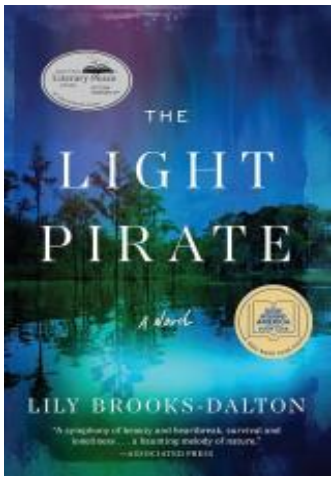
The Light Pirate

by Lily Brooks-Dalton



About the Book

"A luminous and wrenching portrait of a frighteningly possible future," THE LIGHT PIRATE is a hopeful, sweeping story of survival and resilience spanning one extraordinary woman?s lifetime as she navigates the uncertainty, brutality and arresting beauty of a rapidly changing world (*Booklist*, starred review).

Florida is slipping away. As devastating weather patterns and rising sea levels wreak gradual havoc on the state?s infrastructure, a powerful hurricane approaches a small town on the southeastern coast. Kirby Lowe, an electrical line worker; his pregnant wife, Frida; and their two sons, Flip and Lucas, prepare for the worst. When the boys go missing just before the hurricane hits, Kirby heads out into the high winds in search of his children. Left alone, Frida goes into premature labor and gives birth to an unusual child, Wanda, whom she names after the catastrophic storm that ushers her into a society closer to collapse than ever before.

As Florida continues to unravel, Wanda grows. Moving from childhood to adulthood, adapting not only to the changing landscape, but also to the people who stayed behind in a place abandoned by civilization, Wanda loses family, gains community and, ultimately, seeks adventure, love and purpose in a place remade by nature.

Told in four parts --- power, water, light and time --- THE LIGHT PIRATE mirrors the rhythms of the elements and the sometimes quick, sometimes slow dissolution of the world as we know it. It is a meditation on the changes we would rather not see, the future we would rather not greet, and a call back to the beauty and violence of an untamable wilderness.

Discussion Guide

1. The English word ?hurricane? is adopted from the Spanish word *huracán*, which is derived from Juracán, the name the Taíno, the Indigenous people of the Caribbean, bestowed upon their God of chaos and destruction. Hurricane Wanda,

however, is depicted as a powerful yet impersonal force: ?The hurricane takes what yields. Nothing more; nothing less.? How do these two interpretations affect your personal feelings about natural disasters --- and their consequences?

2. The novel unfolds in four parts: power, water, light and time. How does THE LIGHT PIRATE?s unique structure mirror Wanda?s journey from childhood to adulthood while also speaking to the changes taking hold of the natural world?

3. One major theme of THE LIGHT PIRATE is humanity?s turbulent relationship with nature and climate change. Frida is paralyzed by the enormity of a collective decline she sees occurring all over the world. Kirby is determined to ignore it, to focus only on problems with immediate solutions. Phyllis has given up on civilization and is instead preparing for the worst. How did these different coping mechanisms make you think about your own response to the challenges humanity faces?

4. In the face of the world?s problems, Kirby and Frida grapple with the idea of bringing a new child into the world. Phyllis is intentional about not wanting to become a mother. Today, some couples are choosing not to have children, in the name of environmental responsibility. Where do you fall in this debate?

5. While the second part of THE LIGHT PIRATE moves readers further into a speculative future, the story begins in the wake of another hurricane, Poppy, which followed the real-life Hurricane Maria, the Category 5 storm that hit Puerto Rico in 2017: ?The government had left [Puerto Rico] to drown and sent men like [Kirby] to pretend they?d done all they could.? How did this passage --- about Kirby confronting future instability, and the U.S. government?s failure to support Puerto Rico after these disasters (one real, one fictional) --- make you feel? How did it make you think about the hardships Puerto Rico continues to face, years after Maria?

6. When Wanda is a child, the world --- as we currently know it --- has irrevocably changed. ?The Edge? is a creeping new reality, swallowing coastal areas inch by oceanic inch, while hurricanes chip away at existing infrastructure and weaken the electrical grid. As a result, Floridians are driven to seek better living conditions elsewhere. And while the book?s gaze is focused on the Sunshine State, we get the sense that other places are facing their own dire challenges. In your own life, how do you think about --- and prepare for --- changing landscapes and weather? How did the author?s depiction of events make you think about our planet?s future?

7. When confronted ?with the rage of a man left behind by civilization? outside what used to be a post office, it occurs to Phyllis that teaching Wanda how to survive the people who stayed in Rudder is paramount. As the novel progresses, we see examples of both the danger and the necessity other people pose to Wanda. What were your thoughts on this conundrum? How would you navigate wariness and trust in such a brutal world?

8. The twins (Corey and Brie/Bird Dog) are two very different kinds of people. How do you reconcile their shared childhood with the adults they grew up to be?

9. The italicized interludes that accompanied each section of the book --- power, water, light and time --- are focused on different elements. What did you take away from these passages? Did they change the way you thought about the landscape these characters inhabited?

10. Phyllis reflected that the world ?would have to collapse in order for a new kind of society to be built; or, more likely,

for some other epoch to have its day. Humanity was an ecological disaster.... Evolution could do so much better. Someday soon, it would.? In this scene, did you agree or disagree with Phyllis? assessment? Why or why not?

11. Discuss the changing relationship between Wanda and Bird Dog/Brie from childhood to adulthood to old age.

12. At the end of the novel, the author presents an epilogue set during Wanda?s old age. What did you think of Wanda and Bird Dog?s treehouse community on the water? What did you take away from this glimpse of Wanda?s future?

Author Bio

Lily Brooks-Dalton is the author of the national bestseller THE LIGHT PIRATE, which was the runner-up for the Dayton Literary Peace Prize, a #1 Indie Next title, and a *New York Times* Editors? Pick. Her previous novel, GOOD MORNING, MIDNIGHT, was the inspiration for the film adaptation *The Midnight Sky*, and her memoir, MOTORCYCLES I'VE LOVED, was a finalist for the Oregon Book Award. Her work has been translated into 20 languages, and she is a recipient of the PEN America L?Engle/Rahman Prize for mentorship. Her latest novel is RUINS.

The Light Pirate
by Lily Brooks-Dalton

Publication Date: April 16, 2024
Genres: Fiction
Paperback: 352 pages
Publisher: Grand Central Publishing
ISBN-10: 1538708280
ISBN-13: 9781538708286